

New Priorities for Lighthouse Keepers

The increasing popularity of lighthouses in American culture is reflected in their frequent use in logos, product labels, backdrops for television commercials, settings for novels, and as subjects of newspaper articles, picture books, web sites, and television documentaries. Throughout our nation's history, lighthouses have served not only as vital aids to mariners, but also as popular tourist destinations. Early on, the U.S. Lighthouse Service in its *General Instructions to All Light Keepers* instructed that "Keepers must be courteous and polite to all visitors and show them everything of interest about the station at such times as will not interfere with light-house duties."

Currently, over 255 light stations are known to be accessible to the public, including 34 in our national parks (see sidebar, "Lighthouses within the National Park System"). In addition to popular tourist destinations as parks and museums, lighthouses also serve as inns, youth hostels, research and educational facilities, Coast Guard housing, nature preserves, and private homes.

The National Maritime Initiative, part of the Park Service's National Register, History, and Education Programs, compiled an inventory of 632 light stations around the country which was published as the *1994 Inventory of Historic Light Stations*. Although the published version is currently out of print, the Initiative continues to update the computerized inventory. In 1994, the Initiative and the Park Service's Historic Preservation Training Center (formerly the Williamsport Historic Training Center) entered into a cooperative part-

nership with the U.S. Coast Guard, DoD Legacy Management Program, and the U.S. Lighthouse Society to address issues related to maintaining and preserving these unique structures. One of the resulting products, to be published this summer, is the *Historic Lighthouse Preservation Handbook*, which focuses on the diverse environmental and maintenance problems associated with the many different materials and construction techniques used in these structures. The Handbook will be made available to every lighthouse manager in the country, both public and private. Two of the articles—"Lighthouse Construction Types" and "Recent Rehabilitation of Anacapa Island

One of Three Sisters Light towers accessible at Cape Cod National Seashore in Massachusetts. NPS photo by Candace Clifford, 1995.



Lighthouse: A Case Study"—are taken from this handbook.

Both the Anacapa Island case study and the article on the Pooles Island stabilization project at Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland outline the logistical challenges of performing preservation work in isolated locations which are subject to harsh marine environments. Interagency coopera-

tion and the support of local communities are key to the success of these preservation projects.

"Lighthouse Management: A Balancing Act by the U.S. Coast Guard" points out challenges faced by the agency with the responsibility of maintaining the majority of this nation's lighthouses. Given limited funding and personnel, the Coast Guard has developed a system whereby lighthouse properties are leased or transferred to outside groups who will maintain and preserve them. Generally in these situations the Coast Guard retains access only to the optic and/or fog signal. Most recently, much public attention has focused on the Coast Guard's transfer of 36 lighthouses along the coast of Maine to the Island Institute which will in turn lease them to groups able to care for them under the "Maine Lights Program." Another large group of lighthouses are also being excessed in Michigan. "Partners in Lighthouse Preservation" gives the perspective of the U.S. Lighthouse Society on how these public/private partnerships evolved and have succeeded.

Two articles describe relocating lighthouses, an expensive, but often necessary activity to save the structures: "Moving a Lighthouse: A Brief History of the Efforts to Restore Drum Point Lighthouse" and "Relocation of Highland Lighthouse, North Truro, Massachusetts." Currently the Park Service is facing the challenge of moving the Cape Hatteras Light Station away from the eroding shoreline at Cape Hatteras National Seashore. This nationally-significant lighthouse is also the subject of a National Historic Landmark nomination being prepared by the Initiative.

Lighthouse education is taking many different forms. "Split Rock Lighthouse: Interpretation at Historic Lighthouses" discusses onsite education for the general public. "Preservation Education at Cape Blanco Lighthouse" describes the use of a lighthouse in a project by university students. "Keeping the Lights for Kids" shows how the appreciation of lighthouses can start at an early age and enhance social studies curriculum.

The increasing popularity of lighthouses and the need for a national constituency to further their preservation was in part the impetus for members of the major lighthouse organizations to meet

recently and discuss the feasibility of developing an American Lighthouse Center and Museum; its mission would be to broaden the public's appreciation and understanding of America's lighthouse heritage. The hope is that this facility would not only create a museum, but also be an archive and foster research; conduct a variety of educational programs; support other lighthouse museums, organizations, and sites; and serve as a central clearinghouse for public inquiry and assistance.

Much has been accomplished in the preservation of lighthouses over the last decade, but there are still many challenges facing the caretakers of this popular resource. Over the next several years, the Initiative will continue its work with the U.S. Coast Guard by assisting them in nominating for listing in the National Register those historic lighthouses under their jurisdiction that are eligible but have not been listed. The resulting multiple property nomination documentation form (MPDF) will include a general context statement about the significance of the U.S. Lighthouse Service in American history, an overview of the various lighthouse construction types, and a general guideline for registration requirements for subsequent nominations.

We live in an era when lighthouses are no longer vital aids to navigation, but growing awareness of their unique role in our nation's history increases their value in our collective imagination. Increasing numbers of citizens, public and private, are willing to devote time and resources to their preservation. Their efforts should be welcomed and augmented with encouragement and assistance whenever possible.

Candace Clifford is a consultant to the National Park Service's National Maritime Initiative through a cooperative agreement with the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO). Lighthouse owners and managers who have not already requested a copy of the Historic Lighthouse Preservation Handbook or wish to update their entries in the computerized light station database, may contact her by writing to National Maritime Initiative, National Park Service (2280), 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, DC 20240 or by email to <candace_clifford@nps.gov>.